

# NEW JERSEY STAMPLESS COVERS: HANDSTAMP MARCOPHILY 1775-1855

**T**his exhibit represents the culmination of a 30-year effort to collect and study the handstamped postal markings applied to the mails in New Jersey during the pre-stamp and stampless period beginning in 1775 until the end of the stampless era in 1855.

At the time of the American Revolution, six post offices had been established in the State, including one at Princeton. The 1775 Princeton straight line postmark is the first handstamped postal marking used in what became the State of New Jersey. Together with the "Princetown" postmark from 1780, they are the only **Revolutionary War** handstamped postmarks used in New Jersey. During the Confederation Period, beginning in 1783, no handstamped markings have been recorded. However, from this period the earliest of the independent mail handstamps is shown, the "Bordenton & New York Stage" used briefly in 1786 on a route from Philadelphia to New York by way of sloop on the Delaware River and then stage wagon from Bordentown, N.J. to the north.

**Straight Line Postmarks** are prominent in the early Statehood days and, with less frequency, were used well into the entire stampless period. These markings, shown in **Frames 1 and 2**, were typically made from local printers' type face and demonstrate a variety of interesting styles, some of which were caused by the mixing of commas and periods and the shifting or loss of spacers. All such reported varieties from Haddonfield and Lawrenceville are shown. Several are the only recorded examples, including a previously unreported straight line from Woodbridge which was discovered in a recent find.

The number of New Jersey towns using handstamped markings was limited because of the federal policy which limited the distribution of Post Office Department supplied handstamps. By the end of the pre-stamp period in 1847, handstamp devices were supplied only to offices collecting over \$300 a year. At nearly the end of the stampless period in 1853, only 64 post offices out of 412 active in the State, qualified for government supplied handstamps. Many postmasters from small offices chose instead to apply manuscript markings rather than purchase a handstamp from a private supplier. However, a few, employing their own ingenuity, created the **Fancy Postmarks** shown in **Frame 2** which represent *all* known examples used in the State including the New Providence in an ornate mortised frame and the negative letter markings from Haddonfield and Lambertville.

The **Oval Postmarks** shown in **Frame 3** represent virtually all reported varieties and were used beginning around 1810. A number of different colored inks were used at both Newark and Flemington during the nearly 20 years that each of these offices used their oval handstamps. Notable are the discovery copy of a new Bridgetown variety, the recent discovery of two distinct Newark handstamps in blue, the green marking from Newark used only in July, 1823, the bright red Flemington used briefly during 1839, and the only reported example of the "Rimless" Flemington oval handstamp.

**Frames 4-10** contain a representative showing of **Circular Postmarks** from a variety of the over 140 towns reporting these markings which demonstrate a wide range of colors, designs, rates and auxilliary markings. The earliest circles include strikes from the brass handstamps which the Post Office Department supplied to Newark and Trenton in 1799. Among the more interesting designs are the rimless circles from Boundbrook, Chanceville, Howell Works, Lambertville and West Bloomfield, the hollow letters from New Brunswick, the thimble-size red circle from Chatham, and the hand-carved wood cut Gloucester City. Many difficult towns and varieties are represented including Branchville, Craneville, Dennis Creek, Everittstown, New Hampton, Port Mercer and Shiloh, the Greensburg county marking, the Middletown Point county handstamp in red, both *with and without* the 1846 year date, and Shrewsbury with ornate boxed "FREE." Green handstamps include Glassborough, Madison, Paterson, Princeton and Shrewsbury, as well as a scarce magenta usage from Paterson.